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MEETINGS

A Guide for Community Organizations

Prepared by
Massachusetts Union of
Public Housing Tenants

Printed by
Massachusetts Executive Office of
Communities and Development
Division of Social and Economic Opportunity

September 1979

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A Guide for Community Organizations

Prepared by
Massachusetts Union of
Public Housing Tenants
13 Fidelis Way (Suite 502)
Boston, Massachusetts 02135

Telephone: (617) 254-7441

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September 1979

PREFACE

This booklet is written for a variety of local community organizations. After explaining why running good meetings is so important, it provides guidance on many aspects of running a good meeting.

Organizations which already run successful meetings may find this booklet unnecessary. If what you are doing now works, by all means continue. This booklet's suggestions about format, rules, division of duties, and the rest are aimed mainly at new groups or at groups having trouble running good meetings.

If you have any questions about this booklet, or anything else concerning how your organization operates, please contact the Mass. Union - 523-6934 (if you are a local tenant organization) or the Office of Resource Development - 727-4074 (if you are a Community Development Corporation).

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I. WHY ARE MEETINGS IMPORTANT?

Meetings are one of the most visible parts of an organization. That's why everyone, including members of your group, will tend to judge your organization by what gets done at your meetings, and how. An organization which gets a lot done because it is dominated by its leadership or by a small clique of members will be judged just as harshly as a group which is very democratic but gets little accomplished.

MEETINGS ARE IMPORTANT BECAUSE:

- They provide one of the only measures by which outsiders can judge your organization.
- They have a lot to do with whether or not your group will accomplish its goals.
- They show whether or not things are done democratically within your group.
- They provide a place for inactive members to see your organization at work and to consider joining with you.

II. WHAT MAKES A GOOD MEETING?

It's a lot easier to talk about how important meetings are than it is to do something to improve them. Good meetings don't just happen -- they require a lot of hard work, thoughtful planning, and careful attention to detail. A good meeting is one which is:

- Well planned, with understandable structure and goals.

- Interesting and informative.

- Democratically run.

There are certain things which can be done before, during, and after meetings to insure that they will be all of these things. Basically, that's what this book is all about.

Sections III and IV look at ways to avoid dull, drawn-out meetings by planning things out in advance. If you take time to clarify the meeting's objectives, work out a plan to reach those objectives, write an agenda and prepare each agenda item in advance, and attend to the small but tremendously important details (like the room, refreshments, etc.) you can guarantee that your meetings will be more interesting as well as more efficient.

Sections V and VI look at how meetings should be run. There are certain rules of procedure which, when used wisely, can help improve your meetings by making them democratic and understandable.

Section VII offers a few suggestions about follow-up procedures which will consolidate and improve upon beginnings made at the meeting itself.

III. DEFINING YOUR GOALS

The first step in planning a good meeting is to decide on the reasons for calling the meeting. Every meeting should have a clear purpose.

A. FIVE MOST COMMON REASONS FOR HOLDING MEETINGS:

1. To identify potential members, willing volunteers, and facilitate work through committee assignments. Organizational meetings should be well publicized, planned well in advance, and should concentrate on a few carefully-selected issues which affect people directly.

2. To get or to keep people informed. Informational meetings can be called to spread information about new rights, new programs, or new regulations, or to keep people informed of the status of a project, etc. Before calling an informational meeting, be sure to ask yourself whether phone calls, newsletters, media work or small house gatherings might spread the word better.

3. To make decisions. Decisional meetings require a great deal of advance planning, since the only way to keep your meetings from turning into organized gripe sessions where everyone argues about half-understood strategies is to have several alternative proposals thought through, and preferably written up, in advance. Prepare for meetings where people have to make decisions by having several alternate proposals or courses of action drawn up for each issue. Then have people who thoroughly understand these proposals present them to the group for discussion and a vote. The general membership can always modify these proposals, but it is easier for members to understand what is being discussed, and to participate in discussion when they have concrete suggestions to agree or disagree with.

4. To develop new ideas and insights by directing group attention to common problems. Brainstorming sessions are great for getting ideas for new projects or goals, and for re-evaluating old ones, but they often generate a great deal of conflict. Brainstorming works only when the group is able to concentrate on the same issue and is willing to work together and listen to one another.This is usually best done outside of the main membership meetings. The results of these meetings should always be reported to the full membership.

5. To build organizational morale by demonstrating to each participant the strength and size of the group and the support which others are adding to each member's efforts. Morale or Show of Support meetings should be held only when you're sure you'll be able to muster an impressive enough number of people. If your intention is to show your municipality or local housing authority ("LHA") that your group has the solid backing of others or to prove to new members that the organization is strong enough to get things done, your purpose is defeated if only five people appear at the meeting. If you're thinking of calling a meeting for any of these reasons, you should probably work out a plan both to recruit and to remind people to come. You may also want to set a minimum attendance figure and a cut-off date -- if you don't have enough people by that date, you might want to cancel the meeting until you drum up some more support.

Most meetings of the whole membership of your community organization are a combination of all five purposes--they organize the work load, inform members

of new development and projects, provide a forum for making decisions, etc. Sometimes, though, one purpose will be more important than another, and by thinking ahead of time about the reasons for which your meeting is being called, you can prepare a plan designed specifically to achieve those goals. A meeting called primarily for organizational purposes will require a different kind of strategy than a meeting which is primarily informational. Once you've defined the objectives of your meeting, the next step in planning your meeting is to decide what kind of meeting can best accomplish those goals.

B. KINDS OF MEETINGS HELD BY COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS.

The work of community organizations is usually done in three different kinds of meetings. Planning and coordination of the group's activities is done by an executive board (board of directors, policy board, whatever your governing board is called). The actual work (writing up detailed proposals, meeting with the LHA or Mayor, making recommendations about strategies, etc) is usually done by committees. These plans and proposals are then presented to the general membership meetings for discussion and final decisions.

1. General membership meetings are open to all residents you represent. General membership meetings can be called for any or all of the five reasons mentioned in Section A above.

2. Executive Committee meetings are usually less formal than membership meetings, since they usually comprise only a few individuals. The composition of the executive board varies from group to group, but most often consists of the chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and some members-at-large. Executive meetings are usually called to plan upcoming meetings, coordinate the activities of the committees, plan strategy, and make tentative decisions which will be ratified, amended, or overturned by the general membership. (CDC Board meetings are usually more formal and decisions made there are often not tentative).

3. Committee meetings should be where the bulk of the work of an organization gets done, once enough people are involved to form several committees. A standing committee continues from year to year, though the people on it may change (a bylaws committee is an example of a standing committee). Special committees are appointed by the president or elected by the membership to handle a specific assignment; when their job is done they cease to exist. For example, special committees might be set up to plan a pot-luck dinner, to investigate a complaint, write up a proposal, or to gather facts and information about some issue and report back to the general membership. Committee meetings are held as often as necessary, with as many members as are required to get the work done, and are usually run informally. An important product of committee meetings is committee reports, which are presented to the general membership or board as a record of what that committee has discussed and accomplished since the last general meeting or Board meeting.

BYLAWS

Meetings should be run in accordance with the bylaws of your organization. Bylaws are the rules of an organization -- they provide for the orderly conduct of business by putting in writing the goals of the group, how it is organized, and the rules that all members have agreed to follow when carring out routine business. They include:

1. The full name of the organization.

2. The purpose of your organization -- what the organization is for, who it is supposed to serve, and what kind of activities it engages in.

3. Requirements for membership.

4. When regular meetings will be held, and how and when people will be notified.

5. The number of members who must be present when a vote is taken (called a quorum).

6. What sort of officers and leadership the organization will have, how they will be selected, what their duties will be, and how they can be removed from office.

7. Terms of office.

8. Information about committees.

9. When and how bylaws are to become effective and what must be done to change them.

Bylaws are important to have because they state clearly and concisely the rules and goals of your organization. They are also required if you are going to become incorporated. Most importantly, bylaws are a protection for your group. No housing authority or splinter group can, for instance, accuse your officers of being in office improperly if your election procedures are in your bylaws and your records show that they have been followed.

If you don't have bylaws, or you think your present bylaws need updating, get a copy of the Mass. Union's booklet "Structure for a Local Tenants Organization: Bylaws, Incorporation, Tax Exemption." If you are a CDC, request a copy of the Office of Resource Development's Manual on How to Form a CDC (available in the Fall of 1979).

IV. BEFORE THE MEETINGS

Once you've decided what kind of meeting is best suited to your objectives, your next step is to prepare a detailed plan that's designed to achieve the specific results you're after. This involves two stages of planning -- things to do before the meeting and things to do at the meeting itself. Before the meetings:

1. Plan your agenda with your objectives in mind. An agenda is a list or outline of things that the group must discuss and act upon at a meeting. Agendas insure orderly meetings by listing in order all business to be covered at the meeting, guaranteeing that important matters will not be overlooked or crowded out. They can also serve as schedules to guarantee shorter meetings by allowing the chairperson or membership to limit the discussion time on each item. Finally, by informing the membership of when each item will be considered, agendas give members a chance to plan ahead for discussions in which they plan to participate.

   AGENDAS SHOULD:

   - Be manageable. Don't try to accomplish too much at one meeting.

   - Have time limits. Each agenda item should be assigned a maximum time limit. This insures that meetings will never last more than one and a half to two hours. Two hours is a good time limit because after that people get tired and find it difficult to follow what is going on.

   - Include a mixture of heavy and light agenda items. Don't have the same routine list every month -- just list what's necessary. Routine matters become boring very fast, and boredom discourages attendance, so try to structure some excitement into your meeting. (You might, for instance, consider inviting a prominent community member to come speak.)

   - Be simple and clear enough for first-time participants, as well as regular attenders. Everyone present should feel that they understand the meeting and feel welcome to participate actively if they choose, so plan your agenda mix with that in mind.

   Agendas should be prepared by the chairperson and executive board a few days before the actual membership meeting. (Agendas for committees can be handed to memebers before or at the meeting.) Some bylaws require that an agenda be sent to members a certain number of days before the meeting, so check on that. (Sending the agenda to all residents, incidently, is a great way to increase attendance. It serves as a meeting reminder and also explains what the meeting is going to be about.) Preparing your agenda well in advance of the meeting is the most important element in planning a good meeting. An agenda insures that your meetings will be short, understandable, and interesting.

2. Plan a publicity campaign that is geared to your goals. Publicity can make or break your organization. Poor publicity means low attendance, and low attendance may hurt your efforts. There are certain things that should be included in any publicity stragety:

- Work up a recruiting plan which stresses personal contact. Experience has shown that people don't come to meetings just because of leaflets, newsletters, or posters. These are fine for generalized publicity and for reminding people to come, but they will never take the place of face-to-face recruitment. Set up a network of people (perhaps one per floor or one per block) to reach as many people as possible personally.

- Since you probably won't be able to make personal contact with everyone, go ahead and send out flyers to each door. Prominently display the time, date, and place of the meeting. Don't forget to include the reasons why you are getting together (or the main topics to be discussed) as well as the name, address, and telephone of a person whom people can contact for additional information.

- Have a plan for reminding people to come. Get some non-active members involved in making reminder calls to people who seemed responsive to the idea of an organization during the previous recruitment drive.

3. Involve as many people as possible in the planning, publicity, and organization of the meeting. Consult with as many members as possible beforehand about what should happen at the meeting. Ask for suggestions about what should go into the agenda, and solicit ideas for making the meeting more exciting. The more people who have thought about the purpose of the meeting, the better the chances are for an active, interesting time. Give as many people as are willing something to do before or at the meeting. The greater the number of people who are actively involved in setting up the meeting and who have work to do at it, the greater will be the number of people attending and feeling that the meeting and the organization are really theirs. Try not to scare away new or shy members with too much responsibility, however. Assignments should be based on people's strengths and weaknesses. When a presentation is involved, just remember that speaking before any kind of an audience is a new and frightening thing for most people. If you've asked an inexperienced speaker to make a presentation of any sort, you should help him/her think through what to say in advance and write it down. Participants should be worked with closely so that they are not thrust into the limelight feeling unprepared and foolish.

4. Call all participants of the meeting a few days beforehand to remind them of their commitments and offer aid if needed. The chairperson should keep a list of the names and numbers of anyone who is giving a presentation or taking responsibility for getting something done before or during the meeting, and should make reminder calls a few days beforehand to make sure that the work is getting done. Delegating responsibilities may seem at the time to make the chairperson's job harder, since it's often easier to do something yourself than to supervise the efforts of someone else. But the more people who are actively involved in the organization, the stronger your group will be.

5. Make arrangements for rooms, chairs, refreshments, etc., well in advance of the meeting. Make your arrangements appropriate to the size of the group you are expecting. Be sure to check heat, light, ventilation, sound systems, chairs, restrooms, ashtrays, etc. Avoid meeting in large rooms if you have a small group. If you're having refreshments afterwards, plan ahead for extension cords, coffee machines, cups, napkins, spoons.

6. Prepare all written materials and special equipment. Be sure that copies of any reading material which is to be handed out (like agendas, reports) are ready in advance, and make arrangements for any special equipment which will be needed.

PREPARING AN AGENDA

Here is a checklist to use in putting together an agenda.

1. Minutes and Old Business: check the minutes of the last meeting and note any unfinished business which needs to be cleared up.

2. Committee Reports: include committees and members who are to make reports of any kind. Make sure the people who are responsible for making these reports attend the meeting.

3. Correspondence: the Secretary should go over all correspondence received since the last meeting, and important letters (if there are any) should be summarized and reported at the next meeting.

4. Financial Report: the Treasurer usually prepares and give a financial report.

5. New Business: check on all the new business which has come up since the last meeting and everything which is scheduled to come up before the next regular meeting is held. Everything that the members should act on should be listed in the agenda.

6. General Issues: include time for new business from the floor or for general discussion at the end of the meeting.

SAMPLE AGENDA

1. Minutes of the last meeting.
2. Treasurer's report.
3. Report of the Nominating Committee.
4. Report of the Lease Committee (tenant organization)
5. Report of the Venture Committee (CDC)
6. Consideration of establishing a new committee on security issues.
7. New Business.

CHECKLIST FOR THE MEETING

1. Is there a clear and necessary reason for calling the meeting?

2. Has the executive board met to plan the agenda?

3. Have the officers been contacted, and general publicity (especially person-to-person contacting) been taken care of?

4. Are the minutes of the previous meeting ready for presentation?

5. Are committees and/or individuals prepared to report? (They should be told how long they have to present their reports and discuss any proposals. They should also be given help in preparing presentations if they haven't done it often before. Be sure to call these people the night before to remind them of the meeting.)

6. Has the meeting room been prepared? Check heat, lighting, chairs, restrooms, ashtrays, etc.) If you're having refreshments afterwards, plan for extension cords, cups, napkins. Plan with the size of the group in mind.

7. Is all special equipment ready to use? (Blackboards, projectors, microphones, etc.)

8. Are materials (agendas, reports, minutes, newspapers, pamphlets) ready to hand out?

9. Have reminder calls been made to those who expressed interest in your meeting?

V. AT THE MEETING ITSELF

Careful planning and preparation are prerequisites for an organized, efficient, productive meeting. Whether or not your hard work before the meeting will pay off, however, depends on what happens at the meeting itself. Even the best planning in the world can't help a meeting which starts late and drags on forever, or which is dominated by one clique. Both the leadership and the membership must work hard during the meeting to maintain order and fairness.

OFFICERS SHOULD:

1. Never start late, as if people had nothing better to do with their time. If the meeting must be delayed for some reason, explain why honestly and straightforwardly.

2. Set the appropriate tone from the beginning. The meeting should be called to order and everyone quieted down by the chairperson. The meeting should start on a note of seriousness and efficiency; the chairperson should introduce him/herself, state the purpose(s) of the meeting, and explain the agenda.

3. Keep the session moving. If you're the chairperson and the membership is shy about making motions, keep things moving by saying something like "the report of the committee recommends that we.... Do I hear a motion?" You might also consider having a floor team who understands the rules to handle situations which arise in general meetings, like calling the question and adjournment (see Chapter VI). Make sure that all comments are directed to the chair for everyone to hear. When a person has spoken on a motion longer than the allotted time, ask him/her to finish up so that someone else might speak. Be sure that both sides of an issue are given equal time. Try not to exceed the time limit allotted to each agenda item.

4. Make sure that the major concerns of everyone are raised. Every agenda should have an open discussion item at the end as a way of handling issues not related to the agenda topics. Open discussion should also have a fixed time limit, however, and that is a good way of handling potentially disruptive items. Be sure to consult the membership about even the most routine matters which are raised in committee and executive meetings. If members don't come to meetings, chances are it's because they feel they have no say in what goes on at them. Effective participation comes down to the question of whose organization it is. The need for rules means the meeting will be run by officers, but the officers shouldn't dominate and shouldn't decide important issues -- they are there to run the meeting, not the group.

5. Make the new people feel welcome. Before the meeting starts, introduce them to other people. Set up a welcoming committee to search out new people in the few minutes before the meeting begins. Sit new people next to more experienced members who can explain what is going on at the meeting. Have your welcoming committee follow up new people; talk to them afterward and explore their interests. Inform them of the accomplishments of your group and your present activities (especially social activities) in a letter or a new members' information kit.

6. End the meeting decisively. Make sure everyone knows the meeting is over -- don't let it end by having people drift out one by one. End it on a good note, summarizing what has been accomplished and praising the main actors and participants. Remind people of what still needs to be done. Everyone should know when they leave what the next step of the organization is and what they are supposed to do. And when the next meeting will be.

So far, a lot of stress has been laid on the role of the chairperson and other officers -- this isn't too surprising, since this is a book on how to run meetings, and the officers are the ones who do most of the planning and who actually run the meetings. But this doesn't mean that the members should be passive and quiet and accept whatever the chairperson says or does. The final decision-making power rests with the membership, so it is very important that members know and accept their responsibilities to the group by contributing actively at meetings.

MEMBERS SHOULD:

1. Know the rules. The rules of procedure presented in Chapter VI help to minimize conflict while maximizing efficiency and fairness. Rules must be known and understood by everyone, however, if they are to be of any value. It doesn't do anyone any good if the officers are the only ones who can use the rules, since it is the members, not the officers, who really should be in control of the meeting. Meetings are like card games -- you need to know the rules to play. This doesn't mean everyone should sit down and memorize the names of all the motions, when they can and can't be made, etc. It is enough if you understand the principles behind the rules themselves. Then, when you're in doubt about which specific rule applies, or how to word your proposal, you can simply ask the chairperson or someone else for help, or look it up.

2. Participate. Speak out on ideas or motions which you disagree with. Silence means consent. If members listen carefully to both sides, weigh the arguments for each, and vote according to the group's best interest as they see it, then they are fulfilling their obligations as members. Keep your comments short and to the point, but if the chairperson makes a mistake or mis-rule, or an issue needs to be raised, or the meaning of a motion is unclear, it is your responsibility as a member to bring the matter to the attention of the group.

3. Discuss issues, not personalities. Don't let discussions get personal. Personal conflicts can and should be resolved outside the meeting room. The organization is there to solve group problems, which will improve the lives of each individual, not to make public issues out of personal squabbles. Debate the issues and stick to the facts.

4. Always remember that every person has a right to be heard. No matter how unpopular someone's opinions are, everyone who is affected by the decisions of your group has a right to express his/her viewpoint. Once the discussion has ended and a vote has been taken, however, these same people must accept and abide by the decisions of the majority of the group.

5. Keep informed about your organization's purposes, plans and progress. Take an active part in setting the goals and priorities of your organization, and change things that need changing. If you don't do it, no one else will

PUBLIC OR PRIVATE? (FOR TENANT ORGANIZATIONS)

Confusion often arises over whether a meeting must be open to non-members (especially LHA staff) and whether the LTO is covered by the public meeting law. The answer is no. An LTO is a private group and has every right to limit its meetings to tenants and invited guests. If you invite LHA staff, it is probably best to have a break after their presentation and then reconvene with tenants only. (Regardless of how good your relationship with your authority is, it is wise and perfectly appropriate for you to meet alone at least some of the time.) There are also no requirements that you post or advertise your meetings.

DUTIES OF THE OFFICERS

The Chairperson's three primary duties are to prepare the agenda, run the meetings, and keep the organization moving toward its goals. In addition to these three main functions,

A CHAIRPERSON SHOULD:

1. Keep the meeting moving. Avoid sidetracks and keep debate on the subject under discussion. There may be a few people who tie up the meeting by using the rules to get recognized in order to talk about personal gripes -- but don't allow the rules to be abused by letting people wander off the subject, enter into personal exchanges with other members, or talk about personal problems. The chairperson should politely bring speakers back to the subject by saying something like: "The chair must interrupt Mrs. Jones and ask her to speak only on the motion before the membership," or, "Will Mrs. Jones please address her remarks to the chair only." The chair also keeps the meeting moving along by sticking to time quotas for agenda items, by limiting debate, and by suggesting motions. The chair can save time, for example, by routinely asking, after reports, "Do I hear a motion to accept the report as presented?"

2. Make sure that everyone understands the rules and procedures. It is easy for people to lose track of what they are voting on during long discussions, so periodically repeat the motion before the membership, explaining what it says and means in clear and simple terms. Always repeat the motion or amendment before it is voted on. Explain what a yes vote will mean and what a no vote will mean. Explain how and why rules apply to the discussion. If there are new members at the meeting, have an experienced member sit near them to explain what is happening. Help members work within the rules by pointing out how they can best accomplish their purposes. Suppose, for example, that someone makes a good suggestion, but that it is off the subject which is being discussed. (This is called "being out of order.") Don't interrupt rudely, but say, "Mr. Jones is suggesting that we appoint a temporary summer activities committee. This subject is out of order here, but I recommend that he make his suggestion again as a motion when we discuss new business, at the end of the agenda."

3. Give everyone a chance to speak, by asking long-winded or insistent speakers to limit their remarks in order to give others a chance to discuss their views. Try to give everyone who wants to speak on a motion a chance to speak -- recognize the first person who asked to speak, but indicate what order people will speak in after that. Before calling for a vote, be sure to ask if anyone else wishes to discuss the matter further. Of course, if debate drones on too long, time will have to be called, or a motion made to "table the motion" until the next meeting.

4. Protect the minority by soliciting comments from both sides of every issue. If you feel only one viewpoint is being presented because people are too intimidated to speak, you might say, "We have heard someone speak in favor of this motion. The chair will now recognize a speaker against the motion. Mr. Forest, are you "for" or "against"?" The chair must always act as an impartial referree, not adding weight to one side of the issue by actively participating in the discussion or by choosing speakers who agree with him/her. If the issue is important enough that the chair feels a need to contribute something to the discussion, he/she should "leave the chair" by putting the vice chairperson in charge for the rest of the discussion and addressing the group as an individual member. Finally, the chair should never allow an unpopular or minority viewpoint to be shouted down.

A VICE-CHAIRPERSON SHOULD:

1. Conduct meetings and handle the group's business when the chairperson is absent.

2. Conduct meetings when the chairperson wishes to enter the discussion by "leaving the chair."

3. Have the same leadership qualities and good relations with group members as the chairperson has.

A SECRETARY SHOULD:

1. Take minutes of the meetings.

2. Prepare the minutes for presentation at the meetings. (See Ch. VII on writing minutes.)

3. Receive and handle all correspondence.

A TREASURER SHOULD:

1. Be responsible for the group's financial business.

2. Be responsible for keeping an accurate record of all money received and spent.

3. Usually sign all checks and vouchers.

4. Make regular financial reports to the organization at meetings.

VI. PLAYING BY THE RULES

This chapter tells you how to make your planning and preparations before the meeting pay off, by insuring that your meetings will run smoothly and democratically. You can achieve this goal by following certain important rules.

Meetings should be run in accordance with rules which are known and accepted by all. Rules insure that the work of your tenants organization will get done efficiently and effectively, while at the same time protecting the rights of all members to speak and to be heard.

There are two kinds of rules which are important to the functioning of your organization. The first are bylaws, which establish the structure of your group. The second kind of rules are "parliamentary procedures." They lay out a method of conducting a meeting so that all the procedures will be understood ahead of time. The source of these formal rules is Robert's Rules of Order. Many organizations find full parliamentary procedure to be able to operate with more relaxed rules of their own. However, if meetings are likely to get out of hand, it is useful to fall back on the order which Robert's Rules imposes. The more important of those rules are therefore discussed in this chapter.

A. THE RULES BEHIND THE RULES

The reasons for rules are more important than the rules themselves. If every member is committed to some basic principles about how meetings should be run, the rules will make sense and will be followed automatically. They will no longer be seen as hollow, formal requirements. Following the rules should never become more important than what your group is trying to accomplish.

The basic "rules behind the rules" are that:

1. Only one subject should come before the meeting at one time.

2. Every proposal brought before the meeting should be debated freely, with open discussion.

3. While a majority will is sought, the minority, whether it be one person or a group, must always be allowed to present its views.

4. Every member has rights and responsibilities equal to those of every other member.

5. The desires of individual members must be kept in line with the welfare of the group as a whole. This is very important, because there will always be times when one member would like something different from what the majority wants. While this person has a right to be heard, he/she must also be willing to go along with what the other members want.

B. THE BASIC RULES OF ORDER: MOTIONS

When a recommendation is made that the group take a specific action, the suggestion offered is called a motion. Motions are the basis of all action at a membership meeting. Without a motion, no report can be dealt with, no new business can be introduced, no discussion closed, and no decision made.

Despite their importance, however, motions are really very simple things. There are:

EIGHT STEPS INVOLVED IN MAKING A MOTION:

1. Recognition. If you wish to make a suggestion by presenting a motion, you should raise your hand and get the Chairperson's permission to speak. Anyone at a meeting can speak, but no one has the right to talk until recognized by the Chair.

2. Make the motion. When you have been recognized by the Chair, you may offer your recommendation to the rest of the members by saying, "I move that ... (we survey the condition of apartments in our project)."

3. The motion must be seconded. Another member must find your suggestion worth discussing before all the other members can consider it. To support your idea, another member should say, "I second the motion." Presumably, any proposal which cannot get a second does not have enough support to make consideration or discussion worthwhile.

4. State the motion clearly. When the motion has been made and seconded, the Chair should repeat it loudly and clearly, so that all members will know what action has been proposed. If the motion is poorly worded or confusing, the Chair should reword it so that everyone can understand it. Be sure everyone knows what a yes vote will mean and what a no vote will mean. (For example, if the motion is not to adopt a bylaw change, a yes vote will be a vote against the change). If the Chair believes the motion is out of order (i.e., that it shouldn't be made at that specific time), he/she should say so as soon as it is made.

5. Discussion. When the Chair has restated the motion, or had it read by the secretary, he/she should invite members who are for and against the proposed action to discuss it by saying, "Is there any discussion?" Start the discussion off by asking the person who made the suggestion to make a statement in support of it. After this opening statement, members speak for or against the motion as they are recognized by the Chair. A chairperson cannot offer suggestions on the motion unless he/she "leaves the chair."

   If the discussion lasts too long, or isn't getting anywhere, the discussion can be cut off by "tabling the motion" or by "calling the question." If the debate shows that the motion is unclear or could be improved by making adjustments or added provisions, then the members will probably want to change the motion a little by making an amendment. This procedure is discussed in detail on page 18 .

6. Restating the motion. When no one else wants to speak on the motion, the Chair closes debate by restating the motion: "The motion before us is...."

7. Voting. When discussion is finished, and the motion has been restated, the Chair calls for the vote. There are three different procedures for taking votes; they are discussed on page 19 .

8. The result. The Chair announces whether or not the motion has been approved: "The motion has carried" or "the motion does not carry."

C. AMENDING MOTIONS

An amendment to a motion or a substitute motion may be offered at any time AFTER a motion has been seconded and BEFORE the vote is taken.

The person who wishes to make an amendment on a motion must first be recognized by the Chair, state the amendment as a motion, and have the motion be seconded by someone else. Ordinarily, amendments are made to change a motion or to include more specific information. They should be short, clear, and specific as to what section of the original motion they apply to. For example, Mrs. Green makes a motion that "the Executive Board investigate the issue of security in the community." Another member wishes to change this motion by changing the words "Executive Board" to "a special committee." At this point, the Chair can ask Mrs. Green if she would be willing to accept the amendment as part of the original motion. If she is willing, and no other member objects, the amendment is accepted without wasting further time. Otherwise, the amendement must be discussed and voted on the same way regular motions are.

The trick is that amendments are voted on first, and then the original motion is voted on. To do this, the Chair repeats both the motion and its amendment, then says, "All those in favor of striking the words "Executive Committee" and substituting "special committee" please raise your hand." After discussion and voting on the first amendment have taken place, a second amendment may be offered. There is no limit to the number of amendments which may be made, but each must be discussed and voted on separately.

THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT AMENDMENTS:

1. All amendments must be seconded before they can be considered.

2. Amendments must be debated and voted if they are not agreeable to the person who made the motion which is being amended.

3. No amendment which is contrary to the motion under consideration can be made. (For example, you can't move not to do the thing which the motion suggests.)

4. Amendments must be closely related to the subject of the motion. They can't be used introduce a new subject. A separate motion must be made after the one currently under discussion is dealt with.

5. Only one amendment can be made at one time, but amendments can be made to amendments, if necessary.

6. The amendment to the amendment, the amendment, and then the motion must be debated and voted on, in that order, until the main motion has been voted on and has been either passed or defeated. This means that a favorable vote on an amendment or on an amendment to an amendment does not carry the motion with it. It is possible for members to accept an amendment because it is an improvement over the original motion, or because it is the lesser of two evils, but still reject the idea of the motion itself. In our example, the tenants may decide that if there is to be a committee on security, it should be an elective, special committee rather than the Executive Committee. After

debating the amended motion, however, they may decide that any committee at all is either unnecessary or undesireable.

Substitute motions can replace the original motion and include changes or suggestions brought up in discussion or offered in amendments, thus clearing the confusion of multiple amendments. The substitute motion must be acceptable to the maker of the original motion, or it may be offered, seconded, discussed and voted on in the usual way. Substitute motions, like amendments and motion, can be amended. Their great advantage is that they can simplify the action by keeping everything understandable. If a substitute motion is adopted, the previous motion and all its amendments are wiped out and no longer have to be dealt with.

D. VOTING

The Chair calls for a vote only when there is a motion (or, in the case of elections, a nomination) on the floor. When it appears that discussion is finished, the Chair should ask, "Are you ready for the vote?" If no one wishes to speak further on the motion, the motion is restated and the vote is taken. There are three different ways of voting. A voice vote or a show of hands is usually most appropriate for the routine matters which arise in regular business meetings. Ballot voting is usually reserved for important matter and elections.

1. Vote by voice. After rereading the motion, the Chair asks that "All those in favor of the motion say 'yes,'" and then, "All those opposed, say 'no.'" The Chair then announces the result by saying "The yeses (or no's) have it; the motion is carried (or, is not carried)."

2. Vote by show of hands or by standing up. When the Chair or the membership have any doubt as to which side has won a voice vote, a vote by show of hands or standing up is useful. It is less open to interpretation of bias. Either the Chair or the membership may call for a hand or standing vote by "calling for a division of the house." The Chair must call for a vote by asking all members who favor the motion to raise their right hands or to stand and be counted. The Chair then makes the same request for those opposing the motion.

3. Vote by ballot. On very important (like ventures) or controversial items, voting should be by ballot. By-laws often require that certain votes, like those for election of officers, be taken by this method. In other cases. ballot voting may be called for by a motion from the floor; a motion for a ballot vote is not debateable and requires a simple majority. The vote is conducted by the Chair, but he/she may appoint someone else to distribute, collect, and count the votes. A written tabulation of the vote should go to the Secretary, and the results are entered into the group's official record (the minutes). Voting by ballot may be secret, or the membership may require that all ballots be signed. Some LTOs find it useful to get a list of all tenants from their LHA to use as a checklist when collecting ballots.

E. SPECIAL MOTIONS AND "POINTS"

There are a few special procedural motions which can be made to keep a meeting moving. It is not necessary to know all of them, but you may be curious after seeing other members use them.

1. Motion to lay on the table. This motion allows postponement of a decision on the matter under discussion. If it is "placed on the table," no further action is taken on the matter until a motion to "take it from the table" is passed later in the meeting, or at another meeting.

2. Motion to commit (or refer). This motion may be used to hand a complicated issue over to a committee for further work. A common example is a proposed bylaw change which gets hopelessly complicated during discussion by the membership. The proposal can be referred to the bylaw committee for a recommendation later in the day or at the next meeting.

3. Motion to reconsider. After a vote has been taken, someone who voted with the majority can move for reconsideration; that is, move to have the vote taken over again. This motion may be made the same day as the original vote, or the next. The reason only a person originally voting for the motion can move to reconsider is that the procedure is designed to accomodate new information or other reasons that people might have changed their minds. Someone who was against the issue the first time cannot move for a second vote on the hope of winning the second time around. If the motion to reconsider prevails, then the original motion is repeated and voted upon again.

4. Moving the previous question, moving the question, or calling for the vote. These three ways of saying the same thing all call for an immediate vote. When debate is becoming long and drawn out, someone may "move the question," and the chair must then call for a vote on whether the motion under debate should be voted on immediately. If that motion is carried, the group must then vote on the motion before it, without further debate.

5. Motion to adjourn. This motion is always in order except: a) when a speaker has the floor; b) when a vote is being taken; c) after it has just been voted down; d) when the group is inthe middle of something which cannot be cut off. The motion should not be debated, but rather put to an immediate vote.

6. Point of parliamentary inquiry. Any member may at any time request the chair to answer a relevant question about parliamentary procedure. The chair answers the question immediately and proceeds with the business at hand.

7. Pont of information. A member may also seek necessary information on the topic under discussion by saying, "I rise for a point of information." Such questions should be addressed to, and answered by, the chair. If the person wants to ask for information from the speaker, rather than the chair, the chair must get the speaker's permission to be interrupted. Otherwise, the question will not be answered until the speaker finishes.

8. Point of Order. A member "rises to a point of order" to point out what may be a breach of the rules of the meeting. This question takes precedence over the regular business of the meeting, but not over questions of privilege (below). Remember, this procedure is only for questions about how the meeting is being run. A tenant who calls out "Point of order" just to get the floor to speak on an issue is totally out of order and should be dealt with accordingly by the chair.

When a valid point of order has been raised, the chair may either rule on it, after consultation with the parliamentarian if necessary, or may put the question to a vote of the group. If the chair rules and two people disagree, they may appeal the ruling to a majority vote of the membership. One moves to appeal the ruling, and the other seconds it.

9. Question of privilege. Questions relating to the group's or a member's ability to function in the meeting are called questions of privilege. They take precedence over all other matters except adjournment, and may be raised at any time. Examples might be pointing out that members in the back cannot hear, or asking that a window be opened. The chair must rule as to whether the point is privileged and therefore important enough to interrupt the meeting.

F. ELECTIONS

How your group conducts its elections will be set out in its bylaws. If nominations are taken in writing and voting is by secret ballot at polling places, there will be no election meeting at all. However, if your bylaws call for elections at a meeting, the procedure will look somewhat like other voting.

The chair will describe the duties of the first officer to be elected, and will "declare nominations open" for that office. As people are recognized, each will say, "I nominate _____." Nominations do not need to be seconded. When no one else has a nomination to make, someone may "move that nominations be closed." That motion must be seconded and voted upon. Such a motion is not in order, and therefore should not be entertained by the chair, until no one else has a nomination to make.

After nominations and before voting, the group may wish to have the candidates say a few words so the members can know who they are. Then the vote will be taken and nominations will be opened for the next office to be filled.

VII. AFTER THE MEETING

After the meeting is over, make sure you have a plan to follow up all the new members. Do evaluation sessions with your core group and interested members to find out how the meeting went and how it could have been improved. Help people to understand any mistakes which might have been made and to learn from experience what works and what doesn't.

Persons with assigned tasks should move ahead on them. The Secretary, in particular, should put the minutes in good form and distribute them as soon as possible. When minutes are written up quickly, errors are reduced,and squabbles over the accuracy of the minutes are avoided.

Your organization should keep moving between meetings. In fact, most meetings are mainly for hearing reports on progress made since the last meeting. If at all possible, every meeting should find that the organization is ahead of where it was at the last meeting. This goal is best accomplished through the work of active committees. A committee appointed at one meeting, or given an assignment, should have activity to report on at the next meeting.

COMMITTEES AND THEIR REPORTS

The general powers of committees and the method of creating them should be set out in an organization's bylaws. Basically, a committee exists (either permanently or short-term) to work in a specific area. It cannot make decisions for the larger group unless specifically given the power to do so.

A committee chairperson is usually appointed by the organization's chairperson when the member s for that committee are selected. When this is not done, either the first-named member acts as chairperson, or the committee chooses its own chair. Each committee also chooses a secretary, and, if it is a large committee, a vice-chairperson.

1. Duties of a committee chairperson. Because committees play such an important role, committee chairpeople should plan their meetings with as much care and attention to details as regular meetings are given. Chairpeople should think about what the committee should try to accomplish at each meeting, and work out a plan to accomplish those goals. Agendas should always be prepared. The responsibilities of committee chairpeople are to:

   - Guide the committee and see that the group accomplishes its assigned task(s).

   - Call regular meetings.

   - See that members are notified fo meetings.

   - Actively seek the involvement of committee members in the group's work. The informality fostered by small groups makes it possible to thoroughly discuss every proposal or suggestion in detail as the group moves toward common agreement. Make sure that everyone has a chance to present his/her views.

   - Prepare and present committee reports.

2. Preparing and presenting committee reports. Committee reports are presented at the regular meeting by either the committee chair or by an interested member. They should be as short and as interesting as possible. Why they are extremely important or when they recommend a specific course of action, they should be put in writing to be entered into the official records of the organization. If you have trouble preparing a report, just use the following outline as a guide:

- List the names of all the members serving on your committee, noting those who were present at the meetings covered in your report.

- State the purpose of your committee. Why was it created?

- What action has the committee taken to carry out its assignment?

- Explain the problems and/or success the committee has had in accomplishing that task.

- Suggest specific action the committee recommends that the organization take.

After the committee report is presented, the regular membership or Board votes whether to accept, amend, or reject it. If the report is accepted, any recommendations in it must be carried out by whomever is designated in the report. If the committee submits several recommendations, the group must vote on each one.

HOW TO WRITE CLEAR MINUTES

1. WHAT MINUTES ARE FOR

Minutes are an organization's official record of meetings. The most important part of taking minutes is getting down the official, business actions of a meeting. Official matters would include who is present, all motions, roll call votes, and other official actions. The minutes should, if possible, follow the agenda of the meeting. The minutes do not need to go into lengthy details or explanations of everything that was said and done; a short summary will suffice, and even that is not always necessary. For instance, if a secretary were recording the annual meeting of an organization, and the meeting had both elections and a speaker, the secretary would not record everything the speaker said, although the secretary might note the speaker's presence and topic.

An organization might have several sets of minutes. For instance, the Mass. Union generally has three different sets of minutes: 1) Convention minutes -- the minutes of the meetings of the membership at large; 2) Policy Board minutes -- of meetings of those who are elected to run the Union and who meet monthly to make decisions between Conventions; and 3) Committee minutes -- of meetings of groups of people who have been appointed by the Chairman to carry out certain tasks.

2. MINUTES ARE IMPORTANT BECAUSE:

- They keep members informed about what actions have been taken by the policy-making board (the executive committee) and committees, both in the present and in the past.

- Committees have to be able to refer to minutes in order to see if they are following the instructions of the executive board or the membership.

- The executive committee or Board must be able to see if it is following instructions of the membership and if committees are following the executive committee's instructions.

For these reasons, minutes should be kept in a permanently bound notebook, usually kept by the secretary of the organization.

3. PREPARING AND PRESENTING THE MINUTES

To be official, the board or membership should pass the minutes at the next meeting. In accepting the previous meeting's minutes, they are saying that the secretary did not make any errors or omissions and that the minutes state correctly what happened at that meeting. Sometimes the secretary will make an error in recording what happened, and in that case someone should point out the necessary correction. The membership may then vote to "accept the minutes as corrected by Mr. Smith." Because minutes are so important to the work of your organization, careful attention should be paid to draft minutes by members voting to accept them.

4. CHECKLIST OF ITEMS WHICH ARE MUSTS IN MINUTES

- Date of the meeting
- Persons present
- All motions made, and by whom
- Votes on each motion (so voted, defeated)
- Roll call votes -- how each person voted if a roll call vote was taken
- Everything accepted without a vote (e.g., The minutes of the last meeting were read. The Chairman asked if there were any objections. As there were none, the Chairman declared them accepted.)
- Notation of committee reports presented, whether or not a vote was taken to accept them.

5. THINGS TO WATCH FOR IF YOU ARE TAKING MINUTES

- Don't let people go too fast for you. If the board makes a motion, votes on it, and goes on to other business before you have a chance to get it down, make them stop and repeat the motion. It is important that you get it down.

- Don't write unclearly. Don't rush, scribbling everything down, so that you can't read it when you go back to transcribe it.

- Try to follow the agenda. After the meeting, re-read what you have written. If it is necessary to revise or complete your minutes, do so right away, while the meeting is still fresh in your mind.

SAMPLE MINUTES

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
Hills Tenant Association
October 20, 1975
MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by the Chairperson at 7:40 P.M.

Present were: Joe Salvucci, Mary Joseph, Cindy Ward, Chris Marlow, Jerry Buckley, and John McDonough.

The Chairperson declared a quorum present.

1. The secretary presented written minutes of the September meeting, which were accepted after no objections were raised.

2. The treasurer reported that $15 in annual dues had been collected during October, and that the following expenditures had been made: $5 for postage stamps, $3.50 for supplies, and $35 for the Halloween party for the project children. Mr. Salvucci moved, Mrs. Ward seconded that the report be accepted. So voted.

   The treasurer then reported that he would present to the executive committee at the next meeting a proposed budget for calendar 1976.

3. The nominating committee reported that they had actively been seeking candidates to run for office in January of 1976, and that they would have a full report at the November meeting.

4. The lease committee reported that they had met with the housing authority over the clause in the lease about providing each tenant with two trash cans, which the housing authority wished to omit. This would require tenants to buy their own trash cans or plastic bags for trash disposal. The committee recommended that the executive board reject this move by the authority. If the authority insists on requesting a waiver from this provision in the Model Lease, the committee suggests that the tenant organization oppose the waiver request. Mr. Buckley moved that the committee's recommendation be accepted. Seconded. After some discussion, so voted.

5. The modernization committee reported that the final proposal for Phase V modernization monies had been successfully negotiated with the LHA and submitted to DCA. The final proposal calls for the following items, listed in order of priority: stoves, new roofs for all units on Seabrook Lane, replacement of all storm doors, dead-bolt locks on all units and security screens on first floor windows, conversion of the electrical metering system from individual to master meters. The total estimated cost of all the work to be done would come to $955,000, and it is expected that the housing authority will receive only about $295,000. It is therefore expected that only the first three items will be completed.

6. The Chairperson reported that, as there had been a great deal of talk about the question of pets in the project, he thought there should be a special committee set up to study the problem, take a survey, and make recommendations to the executive board about whether or not to negotiate a no-pet clause for the lease. After some discussion, Mrs. Marlow pointed out that the question really belongs with the lease committee. She made a motion that an ad-hoc subcommittee of the lease committee be established to deal with the issues of pets, and that the chairperson of the lease committee chair the subcommittee as well. After more discussion the motion was seconded and so voted. The committee was directed to report to the executive board at the December meeting with its recommendation.

7. New business. Mrs. Joseph reported that some tenants in her area had been talking to her about holding a Christmas party for the children, since last year's was so successful. She said that if the money could be raised, she would be willing to take charge of the arrangements. A motion was made by Mr. McDonough, and seconded, to have such a party, and Mrs. Joseph was unanimously elected to head the effort. Mr. McDonough volunteered as head of fundraising, and was so appointed.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

_____

Cindy Ward, Secretary

VIII. BEYOND MEETINGS

Knowing how to plan, prepare and run good meetings can make a crucial difference in both the attendance and the productivity of your organization. Good meetings, however, are only one ingredient in your formula for building up participation and for making your organization a really effective instrument of change for community residents. What you do in between meetings -- your activities and projects -- is just as important as what you do at the meetings.

Good meetings are largely a metter of know-how and effort -- hopefully this book has shown you how to improve your meetings. What you do with your new skills, however, requires something you alone can provide: imagination. In order to get more members involved as active participants in your organization, it is not enough that your membership and committee meetings be well-run and efficient (although this is extremely important, since nothing can get done without good meetings). In the final analysis, the only way to build up participation and productivity is to do things which people find important, interesting and rewarding.

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